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A COMMITMENT FOR TOMORROW.

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TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEMS OF OUR COMPLEX SOCIETY, IT IS NECESSARY TO FACE THE REALITY OF CHANGE. ADDING TO THIS COMPLEXITY, MOST OF OUR PEOPLE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE NEIGHBORS ARE FACELESS AND WHERE DECISIONS ARE FAR REMOVED. AS A CONSEQUENCE, IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THE TYPICAL PERSON TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF HIS OWN LIFE AND TO FIND REAL MEANING AND VALUE IN THAT LIFE, WHETHER IT IS IN RURAL OR URBAN AMERICA. WE NEED A NATIONAL POLICY TO SLOW THE MIGRATION OF PEOPLE FROM RURAL TO URBAN AREAS. ALTHOUGH THIS WILL NOT PROVIDE A TOTAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM, GIVEN THE JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND JOB TRAINING, MANY RURAL PEOPLE WILL CHOOSE TO REMAIN IN RURAL AREAS RATHER THAN MIGRATE. TYPICALLY, ECONOMICALLY DEPRESSED AREAS PROVIDE POOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, BUT DEDICATED PERSONS WORKING IN THESE AREAS, WHO CARE FOR YOUNGSTERS AND THINK THEY CAN LEARN, CAN MAKE AN IMPACT. BY PROVIDING YOUTH WITH THIS TYPE OF PROGRAM, ENCOURAGING THEIR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY, AND FURNISHING AMPLE JOB OPPORTUNITIES, IT WILL BE POSSIBLE FOR AMERICA TO RETAIN ITS POSITION OF GREATNESS. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D.C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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General Session

A COMMITMENT FOR TOMORROW

Honorable Fred R. Harris
United States Senator
Oklahoma

I want to say that all us politicians try to start out by identifying with whatever group we are speaking to and say "My Fellow Rotarians" or "My Fellow Rainbow Girls" or whatever group it is. This is kind of a tough one to do that with, especially with some of the things we have just heard from the youth panel, which I suspect is the best thing that has occurred at this conference. It involved one of the things which I was going to talk about: Youth Participation.

The man who introduced me said that I'm considered young. I think of myself as being young, but I went down not long ago to speak at my own old high school - Walters High School. It was the first time I had spoken there since I had graduated, and I thought going over there that I wouldn't have any difficulty identifying with that group, because I could say, "Not long ago I, myself, was sitting exactly where you are now." Then, I started thinking about it. It was 1948 when I graduated there, which seems very recent to me, but by some quick calculations - and I am not very good at math - I was able to determine that not anybody in that school was even born when I graduated.

Now, I am used to considering Senator Hayden and Senator Russell and others and thinking of myself as young, but I am not young at Walters High School anymore, I can tell you for sure.

I am glad to have an opportunity to take part in this conference and to be the last speaker, which is a rather difficult task. I think you are probably sated with statistics and problems. It is a shame that we couldn't have continued - and I am quite willing for us to do that - what we were hearing a little while ago, because I think it impresses on all of us who are not a part of youth today that this is a new world.

I think so many of us are like a folk singer I heard lately, who, as a part of his patter while tuning his guitar, said: "If I ever get this thing tuned again, I am going to weld it."

Well, I think that is the way we Americans are. I think we want to get things settled once and for all and not be bothered anymore. We look about us at the chaos in our cities and the chaos in our world and we almost want to cry out with Hamlet: "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right."

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As we look at these tremendous problems we have in today's world, it is really little wonder that a lot of us are afflicted with a homesickness for the past, or hide our fears in simplistic solutions, or burst forth in irrational and anti-social behavior, or escape to non-involvement. All those things are, perhaps, symptoms of some of the same causes.

If we are going to come anywhere near to meeting the problems in this world, we are going to have to face up to reality. The greatest reality of our day is Change. Perhaps that was always true, but it is certainly true of our day. Change is the most real thing of our day.

First, because of the tremendous population explosion. In the Department of Commerce there is an instrument that looks very much like a clock and it is called a "Census Clock." Rather than measuring minutes and seconds and hours, it measures the additional people we have in the country every minute. We have an additional person born every eight and one-half seconds; one dies only every 17 seconds. And, so, on November 20 - it has already been calculated - there will be a ceremony over there by the Census Clock to commemorate the fact that the United States has become a nation of 200 million people.

I made a speech in 1948, which again, doesn't seem very long ago to me, when I was a member of the Future Farmers of America. I was talking about the population explosion and whether we could meet the increased problems that go with it. Then we were a country of something over 145 million people, and that was just in 1948. On November 20 of this year we will be a country of 200 million people, and that figure is increasing at the rate of 6,400 a day, and it is not going to stop, even with the declining birth rate.

By the year 2000, which is a shorter time away than I have lived already, we will have become a nation of in excess of 300 million people.

Already this is a country, where with just 200 million people, we killed 52,000 people on our highways this year, where the air in most of our cities is unsafe to breathe, where water in most of the streams, expecially in heavily populated areas, is unfit for fish, not to mention human beings, where 14½ million young people in America don't have a sufficient diet because they live in poverty conditions. Think, also, of problems of over-crowded housing and of terribly ineffective schools, and, then, think how it might be just 33 years from now when we are a country of 300 million people.

We have increased problems and drastically, radically changed situations in this country as a result of the fact that there are a great many more of us. And there are going to be more still.

In addition to that, we have had a fantastic explosion of knowledge and technology. I serve as chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Government Research, and I suppose the most startling facts I learned after becoming chairman of that Subcommittee were two: One, that 90% of all the scientists who ever lived in the history of the world are alive today, and the other is that 85% of all the Ph.D degrees ever granted in the history of America have been granted since the end of World War II.

Now, what does that mean? It means that year before last in Oklahoma, for example, we lost 1,100 jobs because of automated elevators. It means that if your only skill is picking cotton, you are in a very harsh and hard world indeed. It means that there is a great deal more which must be known if a person is to take part in American society today. It means, also, there have been great advances in transportation. When I was in high school, there were very few people in our town of Walters, Oklahoma, who had ever ridden in an airplane. Well, now we have the airlines and a fantastic number of airplanes. That is just one example.

We have 100 million automobiles. Thirty-three years from now we are going to have 200 million automobiles. I think that will mean that every one of us will be driving about two automobiles at once; that is the way it seems now if you drive, as I did this morning, in the kind of traffic we have in our major cities such as Washington.

Automobiles are made to be driven somewhere, and airlines go somewhere and that is what has happened. Our people have become highly mobile. Every year at least 35 million change residence. This is a highly mobile society.

In addition to the advances made in transportation, fantastic advances have been made in communications. I had never even heard of television when I was in high school. Now, of course, nobody can be immune to the effects of television and modern communications. No child, no family, no minority group, no person can be isolated from the real world and the real problems of the real world. Nobody can be insulated from everybody else.

With scientific and technological change, the explosion of knowledge and the explosion of population, there also came another change that you and I know a great deal about and that this conference has a great deal to do with, and that is, of course, the fantastic rush into our cities.

Eleven million people between 1950 and 1960 moved into the cities. Five hundred thousand to 600,000 still move to the cities each year. This is a world where bigness has become a necessity, whether in labor or in government or in business, and where units of government have become farther removed from us. So, most of us live in a world which is very impersonal.

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Most of us live in a world where neighbors are faceless, where decisions are far removed. Each of us, I think, is suffering very much from a tremendous desire to have greater power, greater control, over the decisions which govern his own life.

I think that is potentially the most destructive force in modern society today, unless we recognize it, build upon it and use it for good.

Further, if you are a physician these days, you are forced more and more to specialize in a narrow field, to deal only with patients, not people. If you are a teacher in an over-crowded classroom, you deal only with pupils. If you are a harried social worker, you deal only with cases. Nobody really is dealing very much with people.

People understand that. The two greatest forces at work in our society and upon our lives are: number one, the force I mentioned, the tremendous desire to have some control over our own lives; and, secondly, the desire to find some real meaning in life, to find some real value in our work and in what we are and what we do.

This is a world where elevators run themselves, where ditches are dug by machines, where a workman has no product to call his own, to say at the end of the day: "This is mine; this is what I have done." And, so, I think all of us now and then pause and say: "What am I really doing? I've got a fairly good job, it is true, with fairly good benefits. I've got fairly good hours, I've got a pretty good home. But what am I really doing with my life?"

Now, if that is true of us middle-class adults, I think we can see how much more acutely true it is for young people.

If Erich Fromm is right, as I think he is, that the deepest need of man is to escape his separateness, "to leave the prison of his aloneness," that need must have always been felt most deeply by young people.

Ours is a society, unlike so many other societies of a primitive nature - which does not provide any kind of rites of passage. There isn't any easy way by which you may move from the security of childhood into the sense of belonging in our adult community.

Despite the fact that we idealize the family as a close-knit group, constantly together, seated around the dinner table, presided over by a benevolent but governing father, each member of the family communicating with each other and each essential to the family's well-being, that is not an accurate picture of today's family in today's society.

This is a world where there is no work for children - none needed and none required. This is a time when children become physically adult at the

average age of 12, not 17 as it was a century ago, and, because of the explosion in knowledge and technology and communications, every child at an extremely early age becomes aware of the real world.

And every father finds it increasingly difficult to communicate with his child.

And, so, ours is a society where children mature earlier, both physically and intellectually, but, because of the educational and skills requirements today to take part, to become a contributing and productive member of society, are held out of society longer, and in the meantime have less to do.

Now, that is what I think we are confronted with in America whether we live in the city or whether we live in rural areas.

Jim Pearson, my joint cosponsor of the Rural Job Development Bill, has talked to you about the twin needs in rural areas for increased job opportunities and for the training to do the modern jobs, and that is basic and essential. We can be very glad that there is increasing support for the idea that we must somehow get away from the notion that the movement from the rural areas to the cities is an inevitable kind of thing, backed up by immutable economic forces. I think as a matter of national policy, we are going to have to slow down or halt the migration of people from the rural areas and small towns into the cities.

At the same time, I think we shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking that that kind of program, or anything like it, will bring us to any solution in time for the greatest crisis this country has faced at least since the Civil War, and that is the problem of the urban ghettos in our cities.

This is a problem which threatens to tear the very fabric of this society apart, a problem which is very much involved in these other forces of change, which you have been discussing in this conference, some of which I have touched upon this morning.

I think that if you are an adult in our society, you feel powerless. If you are a poor adult, you really feel powerless.

Groucho Marx once said "How are you going to keep them down on the farm, after they have seen the farm?"

Groucho Marx was joking, but I think there has been too much thinking such as that on the part of policy-makers: that people really don't want to live in rural areas and small towns. Actually, a recent Gallup Poll shows, as you know, that that is untrue. They can't live there because there is no opportunity there. Things have changed, I think; we have made great progress but much is yet to be done.

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Well, I took a great many federal officials recently to Eastern Oklahoma to show them some of the rural poverty that exists in this country. As you know, 43 percent of the people who are poor in this country live in rural areas and small towns.

My wife and I recently visited in the home of a fellow I will call "Gabby", who was a good talker; he is symbolic, I think, of many of the rural poor in this country. His family lives in a house where the bottom half of the screen door had either been torn away or had long since fallen off. It was in the summertime, and flies buzzed in and out unheeded. As a matter of fact, an old spotted dog jumped in through the door without waiting for Gabby to open it as we came in. He had been out in the yard working on one of two old used-up cars out there. He apologized for the appearance of his house, where he and his wife and seven children lived in four rooms, because he said his wife had been ill.

I asked about health facilities, and he said it was twenty miles to the nearest doctor and that when they went, he had to get someone to haul them because his cars didn't work.

I asked him what he did for a living and he said, "Old J. B. gets me a job sacking beans during bean-sacking season, and the rest of the time he has been mighty good to get me other kinds of odd jobs. In a good week I'll make as high as $75 a week, but there are lots of weeks I don't make any more than $20 or $25 a week."

I said that I had noticed in the Tulsa Tribune that morning there were twelve full columns of ads for "Help Wanted", and I asked if he had ever thought of leaving, of going elsewhere to look for work?

He said, "What would I do? I have a third-grade education. How would I get to Ft. Smith or Tulsa, and what would I do when I got there? I don't have any skills that would get the kind of jobs that are available or that you are talking about that were in the Tulsa Tribune. Besides, J. B. lets me work out the rent on this house and, at least, I can put in a little garden and I've got a place to live."

The children, two or three of them, had hacking coughs, including the baby who was in the crib. I looked down at one of the children there - and two or three of them had terrible sores on their bodies as well as on their faces - the dog was licking one of them. I was just trying to think what that child was going to be when he was as old as his father. What sort of future would he have; what would he be? And I asked the fellow, "What sort of future do you envision for your children." He said very quickly "What I want is for them to get a college education; I want them all to get a college education, so that they won't be like me; so that they will be able to get good jobs.

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Well, I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. Gabby has all the middle-class standards but few, if any, of the means of achieving them. It is either terribly ridiculous or terribly heroic for him to think of the possibility that his children from that kind of background might be able to get a good college education and be able to get good jobs.

In that county where he lives, 46 percent of the people over the age of 18 have less than an 8th grade education.

I visited the school where two of his school-aged children go. It is a school district with less than $500,000 total assessed valuation against which taxes must be collected.

School was about to start. The superintendent said: "I haven't been able to hire a typing teacher yet or a science teacher because we can't pay as much as the bigger schools and, also, a lot of people don't want to live out here in this area."

That is true of ghetto schools throughout the country, as it is true of poverty areas throughout the country, and we are paying for it double and triple. Many of the schools in poverty areas are criminally ineffective.

I was in Harlem the other day, and I saw a rather exciting kind of thing going on there. A fellow by the name of Clarence Smith, whose "righteous" name is "Allah", heads up a group called the "Five Percenters", whose philosophy, I think, is gripping. The philosophy of the "Five Percenters" is that, when you take out the percentage who are corrupt, the percentage who are apathetic and so forth, there are only five percent of us who can change the world.

He has established - he and his group of "Five Percenters" - twelve street academies in store fronts in Harlem, where people, who otherwise have been totally lost to society, who are just out of it - young kids, girls and boys, who have long since dropped out of school - are in there learning math and English, in addition to which they are learning Arabic, and they have all of the drive and motivation necessary.

Now, after things like that which I have seen all around the country, you can't answer me any more by saying: "We can't solve all the problems of society in the schools when the environment is bad and the homes are bad, and so forth." I know it is tough. But the environment in the home hasn't changed for those kids I saw in those street academies in Harlem. Their environment is exactly the same; their home life is exactly the same. But something has changed. One thing that has changed is that somebody believes they can learn. That is one thing that has changed.

The other thing that has changed is that they are being treated like men. That is the strange thing about the way we treat kids, and especially the kid who grows up in a poverty area in eastern Oklahoma or in Bedford-Stuyvestant in New York; he is the kid who has been living by his wits for a long, long time. We want him to be a man everywhere but in school, and we assume that, unless we treat him as a child, he will not learn.

I think we are going to have to examine ideas such as that. I think we are going to have to give youth an opportunity to participate, and I think we are especially going to have to do it in these poverty-level schools.

We can do no worse out here in Morgan School here in Washington, which I visited the other day, than that school was before they started this new experiment this year. They had eight classes going half days in an auditorium, for example.

It is a funny thing that the poor areas always have the worst schools, always have the worst pupil-teacher ratio, sometimes within the same school district jurisdiction.

And those people rose up in the Morgan area; they didn't know exactly what they wanted to do but they decided they wanted to do something different with their school. They, as a community, wanted to have some control over that school - over what it cost, over the personnel. So, on an experimental basis, something new is being done over at Adams-Morgan. There are going to be great heartaches and grief in connection with it; it is just getting going, but it is a wonderful thing to see - that the poor are not apathetic; they are not without skills; they are not without a desire to participate; they are not without the ability to communicate; that they bring some really good things that we need into our schools as they can, I think, into our society, if we allow not just representation in decision making, but participation that these young people were talking about a while ago. I think we are going to have to have more of the community school idea. I think we are going to have to give people more control. I think we are going to have to give people more power over their lives, and particularly is that true with young people - not just 18 year old vote, though we need that - but I think we are going to do more than just allow the playing of games. There are now no real decisions that we allow young people to make. We are going to have to let them in on the decision making; when we do, that will mean young people on school boards; it will mean young people on board of regents; it will mean real power and real participation in decision making. Some of the problems in this country are so horrendous that it is sort of like out here at Adams-Morgan School: it can't get much worse.

I think we need to welcome into society those who do want to participate, and most of us do.

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The other force I mentioned is the force in our world which points the way. That is the desire to find some meaning, some real value, in our lives and in what we are and what we do.

There has been more new in education than just the New Math. What is new in education, among other things, is that some of these things you and I have said, almost by rote: "One Nation, Indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for All/For as Ye Would that Men Should Do Under You...." are being believed by these kids.

The same is true of a lot of other people around this country. Young people in Vista, young people in Peace Corps - and not just young people because there are a great many older people as well in those volunteer programs - are proving to us that Idealism is the pragmaticism of our day, that there isn't anything as real or as practical as Idealism.

I remember a poem that said: "The dreamer dies, but never dies the dream. Say never more that dreams are fragile things. What else endures in all this broken world, save only dreams?"

I think we are going to have to give people the opportunity for jobs. We have been saying for a long time that full employment is the goal of our nation. Now people have commenced to believe that. Isn't that strange - they have commenced to believe that? They believe in our statements about a decent home, a decent school, a decent job, a decent life. These things are becoming rights; whether we like it or not, that is true, and those attributes are not going to go away.

This world has changed and our attitudes are changing. Through incentive to private industry we must increase the opportunities for the recruitment, training and the employment of poor people. But there are not enough private jobs. There are about twice as many applicants for jobs as there are jobs.

Out at Watts, when Aero-Jet General put in a tent-making plant there, the first employment was for 75 people, and there in Watts and Los Angeles they received 5,500 applications for those 75 jobs.

We cannot possibly meet the health, education, welfare and other problems of this country unless we have increasing use of sub-professionals.

We are going to have to have paramedical personnel. We are going to have to increase the teacher aid program fantastically. We are going to have to have an amendment which I have introduced and I think will be adopted to the Social Security Bill for Community Service Aids - to hire the poor themselves and the recipients of welfare to help administer these programs.

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I think we have got to increase the use of subprofessionals and give income to the poor. We have not been very good at that; we are great at giving advice to the poor but not so good at giving income to the poor.

I am not speaking of "busy work" or "make-work" because these jobs are there and will give people an opportunity to have a meaningful, needed, dignified job, in addition to the increased use of poor people in private employment through the kinds of incentives - both rural and urban - which Senator Pearson and I and others have been talking about.

And then, lastly, we've got to expand the opportunity for volunteer services in this country in ways that you and I can't even imagine. We've got to give people an opportunity to find meaning and worth and value in their lives. They want to, but we've sort of isolated ourselves from problems. We put our money in the poor box or we give to the United Fund--those things are necessary. But it's not quite satisfying. Like these young people here, perhaps to a lesser degree, all of us want to be involved with humanity. I think we've got to expand social service volunteer programs, teacher corps, all sorts of such programs in every field of our national lives to give people an opportunity to give of themselves to others.

Well, this has been a kind of rambling sort of speech without any prepared notes. You have probably heard most of this before, and I know you have heard all of the statistics before. But I think, while this is a country with great problems, it's a country which, as in any other time and generation, can meet its problems if it faces up to them. I, for one, wouldn't want to go back to the "good old days" of the 1950's when we had a severe recession, two periods of inflation, and the Korean War; I wouldn't want to go back to the "good old days" of the 1940's when in World War II more people were killed than you and I can even imagine; I wouldn't want to go back to the "good old days" of the 1930's when I was growing up, the time of dust bowls and depression, soup lines and suicide; but whether we would like to or not, we can't. We have to face up to the problems of our day - not somebody else's problems - and we can't solve them with the old liberal-conservative shibboleths of the past. We've got to have a problem-oriented people who will face up to these problems. If we do face up to the real problems, some of the solutions suggested won't sound nearly so nutty.

Then, I think we've got to have people-oriented people in this country. I think we've got to call this Nation back to greatness, back to a sense of direction, back to a sense of idealism. I think that's what we want. I think young people more than anybody else can help us do that. They are, today, the best educated, the most dedicated, the most committed, the best prepared group of young people this country has ever produced; if we'll use them, if we'll allow them to participate, if we'll bring them into the system, if we'll let them be a part. We can build upon what they can bring to us, and I think, thereafter, we could say with Shakespeare's

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King Henry V, who said on the morning of the St. Crispin's Day Battle: "This story shall the good man teach his son; and Crispin, Crispian shall ne'er go by, from this day until the ending of the world, but we in it shall be remembered - We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. And gentlemen in England now abed shall think themselves accursed they were not here and hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks that fought with us upon St. Crispin's Day."